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ABSTRACT

New York City's Dropout Prevention Program (DPP), founded in 1985, has reduced the dropout rate at city schools from 42 percent to 30 percent. This information packet offers an overview of the dropout problem, the philosophy behind the DPP, and information on the steps New York City has taken to provide solutions. The program contains the following components: (1) collaboration with community-based service agencies; (2) school-based planning teams which involve teachers; (3) collaboration with the public and private sector; (4) curriculum enhancement and transitional classes; (5) part-time job development; (6) full-time job development and placement for high school seniors; (7) comprehensive health care and pregnancy prevention; and (8) incentives for effort and achievement. The packet also contains interviews with three DPP students and profiles of three Dropout Prevention Schools. (PS)

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[PART ONE]

GUIDE TO MATERIALS

1. Introduction
2. The Problem: A Fact Sheet on High School Dropouts
3. The Philosophy of the The Dropout Prevention Program
4. Program Components:
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    - School-based Planning Teams
    - Collaboration with Public and Private Sectors
    - Curriculum Enhancement and Transitional Classes
    - Part-time Job Development
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    - Comprehensive Health Services and Referrals
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5. Student Profiles
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INTRODUCTION

In January 1985, alarmed by statistics showing that 42% of New York City students drop out before graduation, New York City Mayor Edward I. Koch and Chancellor Nathan Quinones of the Board of Education decided to sponsor jointly and to fund an innovative three-year Dropout Prevention Program under the direction of Superintendent Dr. Victor Herbert.

Because we are convinced that dropout prevention is one of the most effective investments a society can make in its future, we want to share our vision and the experience of our first two years with the entire community--educators, community and voluntary organizations, medical and health professionals, policymakers, business and religious leaders, parents and students.

In 1987, two years after the Dropout Prevention Program was initiated, the dropout rate in New York was reduced to 30%. This informational packet offers to all those interested in dropout prevention an overview of the problem as we understand it and the steps New York City has taken to provide solutions.

Please write us for additional packets and share this one with your friends, neighbors, colleagues and members of your constituencies.

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FACT SHEET: The Problem

HOW SERIOUS IS THE DROPOUT PROBLEM?

In the broadest context, the dropout problem is best understood as a crisis for our democratic society. When at least one million students are either dropping out or at risk of dropping out each year, it is safe to call this a national emergency. Statistics show that each year 25% of American students drop out before graduating. The problem is far more serious in large urban centers with between 40 and 50% of inner-city students dropping out. New York City's public high school dropout rate was 42% in 1985.

If we haven't found a solution to this problem by the Year 2000, at least half a million New Yorkers will have neither the educational advantages necessary for survival nor the skills necessary to contribute fully to their society.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF DROPPING OUT?

The effects of dropping out are severe, long lasting and, in some cases, irreversible. Without a diploma, most inner-city students find themselves either unemployed or underemployed and underpaid. Dropping out severely limits vocational options, undermines self-confidence and breeds hopelessness and despair.

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics study, High School and Beyond, reveals that two years after they had dropped out most students were still unemployed. Only 60% of the males and 33% of the females were working for pay, full- or part-time. According to their own reports, over half of the men and women interviewed felt that leaving school had not been a good decision.

Even those dropouts who have found work face difficulties. A recent government study of dislocated workers found that workers who had less than a high school education are far less likely to be reemployed after they lose work through layoffs, firings or relocations than those workers with a high school diploma.

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In addition, they tend not to take advantage of retooling programs that require remedial and/or classroom training. Because they did not finish their education, they may not meet the minimum qualifications to take advantage of training activities. Or they may be screened out because it is believed they have less potential for reemployment.

The skills, talents and productivity of a growing segment of society's future labor force may be lost through their lack of an adequate education. This terrible waste of human resources is extraordinarily costly to everyone in our society. For example:

American citizens pay over $75 billion a year in unemployment, welfare and other indirect costs for dropouts and their families.

Dropouts make up half the inmate populations in local jails. It costs about $30,000 a year to keep an inmate in jail, which is ten times the cost of a year of schooling.

Demographics show that by 1992, instead of the current ratio of 17 to 1, only three workers will provide social security benefits for each retiree in our rapidly aging population. One of those workers could be a dropout.

It is estimated that teenage pregnancies cost the welfare system $16 billion dollars annually. Six out of 10 women in families who receive public assistance had their first child as teenagers.

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WHY DO STUDENTS DROP OUT?

The causes for dropping out are found in the complex relationship between the educational system, the students themselves and the structure of a rapidly changing society. Listening carefully to adolescents and the adults who know them best, one thing becomes very clear--urban teenagers are a population under unusual stress.

They have long-standing medical, emotional, educational and economic problems that can make staying and succeeding in school a heroic task.

Students are put at further risk of dropping out in educational systems that are static, underfunded or in pursuit of excellence for the few while neglecting the needs of the many.

Low-achievement, course failure, expulsions, suspensions, grade-repeating, chronic absence, irregular attendance, substance abuse, criminal behavior, pregnancy, poor health, economic need, alienation and boredom are some of the personal, social and educational factors that lead to dropping out of school.

As funding for social programs is cut, and poverty becomes increasingly located in minority communities with single-parent families, the stress levels for urban high school students increase. Of course, not all of these students will become dropouts. Yet, at least one-third to one-half of them will need help to stay in school. A more responsive school and society could intervene and create viable options for these disillusioned and desperate youngsters.

WHEN DO STUDENTS DROP OUT?

Students drop out at stress points in their personal lives and in the academic cycle. Students leave when they become pregnant, when a parent falls ill, when they get depressed, or when they need to work to support themselves or their families. Summertime attrition is also very common. After a break of 3 months it is easier to leave and more difficult to return to school.

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In New York, the move from junior to senior high school is a major stress point. The shift from automatic promotion in junior high to high school promotion based on credits, makes the maladaptive junior high "dropping in/dropping out" pattern even more disabling. Lost credits require make-up work that must wait for summer school or night school. These delays result in lost time, interest and motivation. In a short time, students can fall very far behind and see no workable way to recoup their losses.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE DROP OUT PROBLEM?

Increasing numbers of minority, immigrant and poor youth in large city schools will experience the frustration-failure syndrome that results in dropping out, and the number of unemployed and unemployable young people will grow geometrically.

If we as a nation do not want to create a permanent underclass, we must find remedies as multi-layered as the problem we attempt to solve. No country can afford to waste its human resources, lose enormous tax revenues, weaken national security or lose a competitive edge in the international labor market.

Our remedies cannot be quick fixes, emergency measures that make a big splash and then fizzle out. We need to plan for the short and the long run. We need to make radical changes in our way of thinking about education in this country and apply that thinking to projects that will save lives and sustain hopes.

Only when dropout prevention is given priority status on national, state and local agendas can we begin to see a brighter future.

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PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

Dropping out can be prevented

As educators, our mission is to provide all children with the richest high school experience possible, one that will adequately and imaginatively prepare them for their future.

The New York City Dropout Prevention Program is committed to retrieve, retain and assist all at-risk students, but especially 9th graders, who demonstrate a precarious relationship to attendance and achievement. By targeting at risk students just entering high school and building our programs around them, we hope to change the ways students feel about school. If we can get them interested in school and keep them interested, we believe we can prevent them from becoming dropout statistics.

The High School as Hub of Community

To stem the tide of dropouts, we envision a new role for high schools in urban communities. In contrast to the impersonal, and often punitive, bureaucratic institutions that students and their families must negotiate, high schools could exercise their altruism and moral authority through committed social action and thus move toward the center of gravity in a community's life.

High schools could become a supportive and responsive social institution, a reliable and consistent source of concern, help, and advocacy for students and their families; a caring and effective institution with the ability to service a wide range of needs.

Collaborations for Change

Our program is designed to bring the cultural, social and economic resources of a wider community into the schools to alleviate problems facing adolescents which prevent them from attending school or achieving success.

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By arranging strategic and effective collaborations with public and private agencies, we can infuse the schools with new resources in the form of services, personnel, money, referrals, consultations, counseling, equipment, jobs, energy, ideas and time.

Parents are an important part of our collaborative focus, and their involvement is central to the success of dropout prevention. A personalized outreach by school personnel keeps parents connected to the progress and difficulties their children are experiencing and suggests ways they can help. Structured programs for parent participation create the basis for an on-going dialogue between parents and teachers about education and the life of their community.

Educational Success through Caring Relationships

We believe students will choose to stay in school if we connect them with caring adults who understand the dual demands of adolescence and poverty and take them seriously. If we can provide more concerned adults to help students understand their problems, stay healthy, find work, patiently undo learning deficits and defeats and navigate unfriendly bureaucracies, students will view school with different eyes.

Empowering Teachers

While our goal is to create "student-centered education," we acknowledge and seek to remedy teachers' needs for recognition, support, meaning and involvement. Dropout prevention must capture the hearts and minds of teachers before burn-out and a sense of failure forces their retreat from education. We need to nurture and use the energy, vision and experience of teachers if our programs are to succeed.

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Flexible Structures for Students and Teachers

We know that students in New York City schools tend to drop in and out of school; attending for a week, staying out for two and then returning. When family responsibilities compete with the school program, students tend to sacrifice schooling. We would like to see schools adopt more flexible schedules in response to this widespread pattern; early morning and late afternoon classes, summer and week-end programs.

Failure-proof education

At-risk students are a challenge to the entire educational establishment. Some say they will have difficulty even if taught by the most dedicated teachers. Therefore, they are often passed over in favor of "the promising student" or "the persistent achiever." Under these conditions, a student's sense of failure becomes amplified, internalized and the label sticks.

We believe that all students can learn when they are free to learn, when they are excited by what they are learning, and when they can see the relevance of school for their lives. The New York City Dropout Prevention Program believes that all students have promise and that all students can achieve. Our programs seek to nurture and sustain whatever is necessary for at risk students to experience success.

Laboratories for Change

To test our philosophy, ten of New York City's high schools are serving as our Dropout Prevention Program "laboratories" for change. The schools are South Bronx, William H. Taft and Theodore Roosevelt in the Bronx; Louis D. Brandeis in Manhattan; Far Rockaway in Queens and Thomas Jefferson, John Jay, Prospect Heights, Eastern District and Bushwick in Brooklyn.

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To address the profound, multiple and interwoven circumstances that lead students to drop out, New York City's Dropout Prevention Program has designed an initiative which includes the following components:

(1) Collaboration with community-based organizations that work within the school

(2) An expanded role for teachers in planning and implementing educational change

(3) Collaborations with interested public and private sector institutions and businesses

(4) Classroom enhancements and curriculum innovations

(5) Part-time employment that links earning with learning

(6) Full-time job development and placement for high school seniors

(7) Comprehensive on-site health services and referral

(8) Incentives for effort and achievement.

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PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICE AGENCIES

The Problem:

The transition from childhood to adulthood is not easy for any teenager, but poverty often makes it a time of crisis. Most high-risk students in New York come from families whose annual incomes are at or below the poverty level; their families are overburdened by the social and economic constraints of survival. These children need more support than their overburdened parents or teachers can usually provide.

They need a multitude of services delivered to them in a personalized and efficient manner in order to cope with the many educational, emotional, medical, legal and financial problems that interfere with attendance or learning. If these services are not delivered, students are likely to drop out.

Traditionally, high school teachers and staff contributed their time to help when they could. However, with large class size, language differences and an increase in poverty and unemployment, there is not enough time, expertise or personnel to accomplish all that needs to be done.

The DPP Response:

Each Dropout Prevention Program has contracted with one or more community-based organizations to provide for a team of four or five human service workers to be located in the school and to be easily available to students.

The team is made up of a mix of social workers, attendance liasons, family outreach workers, personal and employment counselors, remediation specialists and job developers who offer their expertise in crisis-intervention, support services to families, advocacy/referrals, and personal and vocational counseling.

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Acting in a social work tradition, team members act as case-managers for the at-risk students who are referred to them. They assess students' needs, link them to services within or outside the school, and oversee the coordination and evaluation of services.

Freed from all teaching, administrative and programming responsibilities, case-managers insure that the needs of individual students are given priority, helping them to turn their full energies toward learning.

The case-management approach is very important for at-risk students who are known to have a very difficult time establishing one-on-one relationships with adults. By providing concrete help in dealing with institutions and relationships that seem remote and threatening, case managers model a trusting adult/teenager relationship which boosts self-esteem and self-knowledge.

With a caring adult to validate their experience, nurture their hopes and give them the information and advice they need, high-risk students have a better chance at succeeding in school.

The active presence of community-based organizations permits schools to channel their teaching resources back into the classroom. By offering a fuller range of services and programs, wider referral networks and greater availability (after school hours, on weekends and during summer vacations), they add to schools' flexibility while providing greater continuity of services for students.

Community-based organizations relocated within the schools bring new programs, new resources, and new points of view. We have found that at-risk students and teachers appreciate the presence of these newcomers, and view them as allies and catalysts for change.

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SCHOOL-BASED PLANNING TEAMS

The Problem:

A school's culture is made-up of formal and informal systems of organization, interaction and decision-making. That culture and how to change it are best understood by those who "live and work" there. However, in most educational bureaucracies, the locus of innovation and control is centralized and policy change comes from the top down.

The Carnegie Report On Education underscores the vital importance of involving teachers in the decision-making which effects their worklives. If they are excluded from the crucial processes of problem-solving, decision-making and program-planning, a rich source of creative innovation and cumulative knowledge is lost. Over time this lack of input and recognition can demoralize school personnel, increasing their alienation and sapping energies that could be used to invent and implement change.

The DPP Response:

An important objective of our project has been to empower teachers in the process of dropout prevention and school change. New York City teachers average over ten years experience in the classroom; they know what needs to be done and the best ways to do it.

In each of the 10 laboratory schools, a school-based planning team made up of 10 to 15 volunteer teachers, paraprofessionals, aides and administrators and a Dropout Prevention Coordinator, a full-time person, usually a teacher, who acts as both team leader and project facilitator. Together with the Principal and the Administration, they plan, implement, budget and evaluate prevention strategies for their schools.

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All teams participate in a month-long summer planning institute, funded by the Dropout Prevention Program, where they create projects tailor-made for their schools. When the school year begins, these same teams meet regularly to implement and evaluate their projects with supervision and technical assistance from Dr. Herbert, Superintendent of Dropout Prevention and his staff.

Yearly budgetary negotiations, allocations and management are considerations for team decisions. School-based planning teams, in collaboration with their principals and school administrations, can and do manage annual budgets up to $800,000.

School-based planning teams have provided teachers and staff with the freedom and encouragement to articulate, develop and implement their educational visions. By building a structure that relies on their experience and necessitates their involvement, teachers have a unique opportunity to put their theories of change into practice. We believe that dropout prevention cannot be successful without this kind of empowerment.

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COLLABORATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR

The Problem:

We know that the dropout problem is a serious threat to the health of our nation, yet schools, working alone, cannot adequately provide all the resources needed to support innovative solutions.

Schools, which typically run parallel to the other social and cultural institutions, must build bridges to a community of concern in order to tap into the rich possibilities for cross-fertilization and collaboration. Dropout prevention requires ending the isolation of America's high schools from the mainstream institutions of society.

The DPP Response:

From its inception, the New York City Dropout Prevention Program has sought to engage the collaboration of the private and public sector though an outreach campaign combining advertising, media coverage and public relations.

Community businesses, city agencies, corporations, foundations, philanthropies and private associations were asked to join forces with the Dropout Prevention Program. Their response was unequivocal; they were committed to the goals of the program and were willing to make unique and important contributions.

For example, The Weiler-Arnow Family Fund, a major contributor to a variety of philanthropies and arts institutions, responded to an article in The New York Times. They decided to "adopt" Roosevelt High School for five years and to introduce and track projects in language arts, writing, vision and hearing screening, as well as fund an on-site health clinic.

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The private sector has enthusiastically contributed advertising, equipment, expertise, personpower, and school based programs. Young and Rubicam donated a subway advertising campaign with Bill Cosby as spokesman. Shearson/American Express, Pepsi-Cola Inc., Manufacturers Hanover Trust, Paine Webber and the Arnow Family Fund have entered into a support relationship with at least one of the 10 "laboratory" schools. The Coca-Cola Bottling Company of New York has invested $ 600,000 in a variety of dropout prevention incentive programs in all 14 Bronx academic high schools over the next three years.

The public and private sector have joined forces in some prevention projects. For example, the Nehemiah II School/Work project is a community collaboration by East Brooklyn Churches, the New York State Bankers Association and the City University of New York to encourage teenagers in East Brooklyn to stay in school.

Beginning June 1987 and running through June 1990, Chase Manhattan, Citibank and Manufacturers Hanover Trust working with the East Brooklyn Churches, will guarantee employment opportunities to qualified high school graduates from the five high schools in East Brooklyn. Two DPP laboratory schools, Bushwick and Thomas Jefferson, are participating.

Public sector collaborations between schools and municipal agencies are logical partnerships in large urban areas. For example, the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development offers job training for part-time employment in the construction field to Bushwick High School students.

These collaborations between the public and the private sector give concerned citizens from diverse institutions a unique opportunity to participate in solving a major social problem. These responsive partnerships, if renewed and expanded each year, could create a web of dependable support that would make a difference in the lives of future generations.

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CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENT AND TRANSITIONAL CLASSES

The Problem:

The Dropout Prevention Program recognizes that many at risk students find it difficult to learn or perform well academically in a standard curriculum which places them at severe competitive disadvantage in the regular classroom. Their typical pattern of dropping in and dropping out of class or school leaves them with large gaps in their schooling. Students' reactions to this frustration-failure syndrome often lead to withdrawal or aggressive acting out; they become leading candidates for dropping out.

The DPP Response:

We are convinced that at-risk students will stay in school if we can help them experience success in a formal, though not traditional, classroom setting. To enhance the traditional classroom, we have invited professionals from the fields of music, art, video, theatre and sports to involve students in the excitement of their work.

Poets in the Schools, The Poetry Learning Video Project, Urban Adventures, The Jazz Ensemble, The Family Life Theatre and " The Max" program, specially designed by The New York Philharmonic, add a new dimension to the definition of learning in high school.

For students who have been absent for several months or more, the transition back to school is often difficult. We have sought to remedy that situation by providing transitional classes which make use of innovative curriculum, computer-assisted learning, classes in urban survival skills combined with an individualized approach to learning. The credits and skills learned here enable students to return to the regular classroom.

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While expanding the curriculum, it has also been important to transform it. Throughout the ten schools DPP monies have been used by school personnel to reshape the 9th grade curricula so that it includes an orientation to the school environment, relevant study skills, and a focus on values and decision-making. Some schools have added Integrated Arts and other interdisciplinary classes.

Tutoring and mentoring have been emphasized in all ten laboratory schools and are crucial in all Dropout Prevention Programs, since they provide needed academic support embedded in a one-to-one relationship. Tutors have been recruited from a variety of settings; high school and college students have joined private school students and volunteers from many organizations to contribute their time and skills.

Mentoring allows older at-risk students to learn what is involved in teaching and to take responsibility for educating someone younger than themselves. Most important, mentoring renews trust in the teaching/learning process and infuses the student/teacher relationship with new possibilities.

"Operation Success", a program of the Federation of Employment and Guidance Services, offers skills training for credit while other employment programs offer part-time work experience and teach students the skills they need to get and keep a job.

Extending the school day and the school year enables students with family and work responsibilities to catch up on lost time and make-up lost credits. For example, PM schools operate from 3 to 5 p.m. with academic subjects, clubs and other recreational activities offered.

Since summertime attrition is common, at-risk students, need contact over the summer so that the break does not develop into a permanent absence. The ten laboratory schools have skeleton staffs which run make-up classes, recreational programs and special events during the summer.

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PART-TIME JOB DEVELOPMENT

The Problem:

Most teenagers who leave school in order to help support their families or themselves, get stuck in dead-end jobs and are too tired or overwhelmed to re-enter school. Having "good" part-time jobs while in school could help them earn and learn until they were ready to graduate. The experience of working would leave them better prepared for the job market of the future.

The DPP Response:

The goal of the DPP program is to underwrite a career ladder for high school students. The first rung starts in school with student aide jobs like tutoring, mentoring, and office work; the second rung is as employees of non-profit community agencies; the last rung is their first full-time job in the business sector.

Part-time work is being made available in two distinct yet interrelated ways. Jobs have been created within the school with funds provided by the Dropout Prevention Program. Students receive mimimum wage stipends for their work as tutors, mentors, handypersons, and homework helpers. In addition, the planning office of the Dropout Prevention Program has asked private industry to provide part-time employment to students. Students have been placed in health care agencies, medical offices and community facilities where they earn the minimum wage, paid by DPP funds.

The very fact that there is a school-based source of employment boosts the morale of the entire school. Good grades and good attendance records help students to get and keep their jobs. These part-time work experiences heighten the possibility of getting a "good job" after graduation, and this motivates many students to stay in school.

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FULL-TIME JOB PLACEMENT FOR SENIORS

The Problem:

Students who do stay in school until they graduate often find that high schools direct their resources to seniors who want to go on to college, leaving those who want full-time work to face the rigors of job hunting largely unprepared and unassisted. Graduates who can't find work are a negative object lesson to freshman who question the value of staying in school when they see that a diploma doesn't necessarily lead to employment.

Finding the first full-time job out of high school is never easy, but can be almost impossible for inner-city youth without "contacts" or social networks to pave the way. They need help finding work and developing strategies for job hunting. In addition, they need employability training and practical work experience to prepare them for their first job.

The DPP Response:

For the first time ever in New York, high schools will shoulder the responsibility of preparing and placing high school graduates in the workplace--in jobs that promise advancement and increasing responsibility. Our goal is to make New York City high schools a resource pool from which business and industry can select their trainees and entry-level candidates.

The Dropout Prevention Program is currently securing pledges of employment from major corporations and city agencies to create a bridge from school to work for those students seeking full-time employment after graduation.

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A specially-trained job-search specialist in each school will design a September-to-June program for seniors that will explore the world of work. During this last year of high school students will learn about the variety of jobs available, what employers expect and what benefits they can provide, and how to manage a successful job interview and land a job.

The school itself will function as an excellent and thorough placement service, assessing, screening and matching a student's capabilities and personality with the needs of the prospective employers. With in-depth knowledge of each student, the job-search specialist can make a good match between available jobs and interested students.

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COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CARE AND PREGNANCY PREVENTION

The Problem

Inner-city adolescents are one of the most medically underserved populations in American society; few have seen a doctor outside of an emergency room setting and fewer have access to preventive health care or education. Undiagnosed and untreated health problems have a direct impact on their likelihood of dropping out.

Sight and hearing problems, upper respiratory illness, asthma, sexual abuse, pregnancy, depression, tension and stress, are high on the list of factors that interfere with staying and achieving in school.

Pregnancy has been cited as the major reason female students drop out. At this time, 4 out of 10 fourteen year-old girls have at least one pregnancy before their 20th birthday and 80% of those never return to school. Those who drop out for other reasons are especially at risk for an early subsequent pregnancy.

Education for pregnancy prevention is essential since teen mothers and teen fathers experience lower educational and occupational status than their counterparts who do not become parents in the school-age years. Daycare for parenting teens is crucial if they are to finish their high school education.

The DPP Response:

Comprehensive medical care, including education for wellness and referrals to hospitals and clinics, could help reduce the numbers of students who drop out for health-related reasons.

Currently, three DPP high schools have comprehensive health clinics on site and others are planned for the future. These clinics are school-based centers of major New York City hospitals. Within the high school structure, they provide students with primary health care and coordinate existing school health services.

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There are many advantages to locating comprehensive health services in the school:

* It is free and immediately accessible. Neither parents nor children lose time from work or school since appointments can be made for free periods during the day.

* The clinic can provide early diagnoses and continuity of care for the treatment of most common diseases; asthma, diabetes and depression.

* The school can care for the whole individual by employing medical teams especially trained in the psychosocial and physical development of adolescents.

In all DPP schools there is an effort to coordinate existing programs that impact on students' health, so that disparate programs can communicate and use a case management approach for individual students.

In the DPP schools, teen programs in family life issues help students talk out their problems and make responsible choices. Some programs are operated by outside agencies and others designed by the school.

For teen parents, New York City Board of Education LYFE daycare centers have been placed in four DPP schools. These centers teach parenting skills and have developmentally beneficial programs for infants. Without this program, teenagers with young children would find it nearly impossible to finish their high school degrees.

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INCENTIVES

The Problem:

At-risk students need to feel that their efforts are recognized and rewarded. Studies have shown that the motivation to succeed is heightened by tangible and meaningful symbols of caring and appreciation. Awards, gifts, recognition and social "applause" or approval build self-confidence in students and sustain their motivation.

When these incentives and rewards are missing, students trivialize the importance of their own efforts and lose hope. Without validation by adults of their successes, large and small, students assume the worst, believing no one knows how hard they have worked and no one cares whether they stay in school or drop out.

The DPP Response:

With generous contributions from the public and private sectors, every DPP school provides incentives and rewards. Ninth and 10th graders have received a variety of incentives to stay in school and improve their performance:

* Adidas, IBM, MacDonalds, Paine Webber, Pepsi-Cola, Random House Publishing, Sanyo, Shearson/American Express, Young and Rubicam, major recording companies and others, made significant contributions.

* The City University of New York gave 80,000 entering freshman a concrete vision of what high school graduation could mean for them by awarding them certificates guaranteeing college admission if they stayed in school.

In laboratory high schools, students who pass all their subjects and reduce their absences engage in healthy competition with themselves and each other for such rewards as: tickets to sports, music, theater and dance events; classical records and books for summer reading; trips to visit the City's cultural centers; participation in school contests and special events and sports gear, calculators, dictionaries and tee-shirts.

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Incentives also include stipends for acting as student tutors, mentors, homework helpers and school office workers. These paid school jobs involve service to others and give at-risk students an opportunity to act as role models for younger students.

By working in and for their school they gain a sense of belonging which encourages their commitment to education. Being chosen to take on these new responsibilities is a concrete demonstration of how valued they are as people and how important their contribution can be.

All reports from Dropout Program Coordinators indicate that incentives have created a great deal of excitement at every school. Whether used to encourage, congratulate or confirm an at-risk student's efforts, they have made school success more meaningful and thus more possible. Receiving rewards for overcoming difficulties and achieving their goals gives these teenagers something to work toward and shows them that they can compete and win.

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[PART TWO]

STUDENT PROFILES

The following three open-ended interviews were conducted by an urban ethnographer over a two month period. The students were referred to the ethnographer by counsellors working in the Dropout Prevention Program. The interviews were conducted informally, off the school grounds, in the students' neighborhoods. The names of the students have been changed at their requests. The interviews lasted from two to three hours each. The students were asked to review the material for factual error and were given a final draft. No facts were altered.

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BRENDA

Brenda is 19, and in the 10th grade. Brenda was born in North Carolina, the second youngest of seven sisters and brothers. Brenda's mother suffered from heart disease and was frequently sick. "I remember the weather was hot and it was pretty," she says, quietly, without a trace of feeling.

When Brenda was two years old, her mother died and she was sent to live with an older cousin. Brenda remained in her cousin's home until one of her sisters, who had moved north to New York City, sent for her and her brother. "I was seven and my brother was six when we got here...I guess she sent for us because she wanted us to have a better life or something," Brenda speculates. "Anyway, we've been in Brooklyn ever since."

Brenda found herself in the midst of a large family. "My sister has three kids and there's me and my brother...The house is very crowded...I sleep in a bed with my baby niece, the one I really love...and the other two, my big nieces, sleep in beds on the other side of the room...I need some space of my own."

In junior high school, Brenda began cutting classes. "I had to do a lot of errands and babysitting for my sister," she explains. "There's a lot of work to do and someone has to do it...And then, after her last baby, my sister, who's on welfare, developed high blood pressure and was feeling very pressured. She began doing a lot of things outside the house and I was the one who took care of the kids...I love my baby niece...She cries whenever I leave but I'm not her mother!...I feel like I've been babysitting my whole life!"

After graduating from junior high school, Brenda entered 9th grade. "I had to repeat the 7th grade, the 8th grade and the 9th grade," Brenda says, "because I was absent so much...I wasn't ever on the streets, I was home!...And I hate to be home!"

Having been left back three times has somewhat daunted Brenda's spirits. She can not seem to break the habit of cutting classes. Even when she has attended school

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consistently, she has had problems. "This is what happens," she explains. "I start back again and they put me in hard classes because they think I can do the work...Then I have trouble passing the tests and they send me to a tutoring program for help, like with math...Then they put me back into the easy classes and I get very high marks and then they send me to the hard classes and the whole thing starts again."

Recently, Brenda began talking to a counsellor in the Dropout Prevention Program in her high school. She finds the counselling very helpful. Like many young people in the Dropout Prevention Program, Brenda believes a job would help her straighten our her life. "I get some social security from my mother but it's not very much and I give most of it to my sister...I don't know," she muses, "there's just something pulling me back all the time...I'd rather be doing something with my life instead of living in my sister's house, taking care of her kids and being left back...I look in the newspapers all the time and I go on interviews and call people but nothing ever happens." As Brenda describes her home life, it becomes evident that she has been working for a good part of her life although she has not been paid for her labor.

"I like my counsellor a lot...It's good to talk to someone...She helps me with my home life...Right now, I plan to stay in school and find a part time job...My sister wouldn't talk to anybody. She's always in a rush, going from one place to another. Nobody can talk to her! And I'm always with the kids..."

"You know," Brenda says, "when I was seven, I was very wild. Setting fires in garbage cans and stuff, nothing really terrible, just things kids do sometimes...And I was failing classes in North Carolina, too...The people there, they punished me...Beat me..." Brenda pauses. "I don't know if I'm sorry I came up or not...I got to get out, that's what I feel...I've got to finish school, get a job and get out."

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JOHN

John is 17 years old, and in the 9th grade. John's mother is Irish, Bronx born. His father was Puerto Rican, also born in the Bronx. "My father was into drugs and alcohol very young," John says. "That's how it was for him."

John's mother married his father at 18. She soon discovered he used drugs, drank a good deal and often didn't come home. She had two daughters a year apart and when the second was two, she discovered she was pregnant again. "When she found out she was carrying another baby," John says, referring to himself, "she threatened him...If he wanted to see his child, he'd have to do something about the drugs and alcohol."

John's father went into a methadone program. "He did stop drinking for a while," John remembers. "He smoked marijuana and stayed home and then he began drinking again...He was sick a lot, the drinking ruined his health."

John's parents began to have bitter arguments. When John was 13, his mother threw his father out of the house. "I thought it was her fault," John says. "I was young and I didn't understand...My father went to live with his brother and I felt real bad for him...I missed him, but when I'd go to see him, he was drunk and he couldn't even talk to me...Once he gave me money to get him some chicken and when I came back he turned around to me and said 'Take care of yourself.' I'll never forget that...He told me to take care of myself."

"Then the next thing we knew he was missing. No one had seen him for three days and he finally turned up in a hospital. Someone found him unconscious in a pile of bushel baskets...The hospital kept him because he was suffering from a cerebral hemorrhage...He was in a coma, he had tubes and stuff all over...The doctors said his stomach and brain were filled with blood and that he was in bad shape...I didn't understand much...At first I thought he was going to make it...Then, one day, the day before he died, I was sitting next to him, holding his hand and I told him the doctors said he was going to die and I told him I was mad at him...And all of a sudden I felt him squeeze my hand and his head started

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shaking like he was saying no, he wasn't going to die...The next day, he passed away..."

During the year following his father's death, John neither cried nor spoke to anyone about his feelings. In school, in the 7th grade, he became a difficult student. "I was a brat," he says, embarrassed. "I wouldn't participate and I talked all the time during class. One teacher thought I was mentally ill! She said she was going to get a doctor for me.!"

"And there was another teacher," John continues, "who I really hated. One day this teacher called me into a room alone and she told me what was in my mind! She said she knew my father was dead and I was holding it all inside, feeling like there wasn't anybody for me anymore, not letting anyone know how I felt...I still hated her but she was right...I started crying right there..."

From then on, John's problems escalated. He was left back in the 7th grade. "I just stayed home," John explains, describing his depression. "I'd think I was going to go to school but then I'd sleep late, and by the time I got dressed, it'd be too late to go so I'd just stay in the house and stay up late the next night watching TV or going out...It just went on like that."

In spite of his nonattendance, John took the test for high school and passed with high grades. He began the 9th grade resolved to begin anew. Other matters, however, intervened. Shortly after the school year began, John's mother lost her job. John had been contributing money to the household from his social security benefits but after his contribution, there wasn't much left for him to buy the things he wanted. And now, with his mother's loss of income, he felt pressured to go to work. "I was desperate for clothes then," he says. "So, I stopped going to school and went to work fulltime in a hardware store. I felt good then. I had money to take home, I bought clothes...I was doing o.k."

Shortly thereafter, things fell apart once again for John. "One night I was in a disco with some friends. The DJ asked people to cheer for their high schools and all my friends were cheering for their schools...I felt real left

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out...Then the DJ asked for the dropouts to cheer and I felt really terrible."

"I didn't have any father to throw me money," John explains, "and my mother was on welfare but I decided to go back to school. My boss gave me a part time job which is really hard to find. He really thinks a lot of me, I guess."

When John returned to school, he was told he'd have to repeat the 9th grade. He tried a second time and couldn't stay in school. "I smoked marijuana and got into hanging out again so I didn't finish the year."

Now, after two false starts, John in starting the 9th grade for the third time. "I only go out on weekends now," he says without a trace of regret. "I belong to the dropout prevention club in my school but I can't go on trips with them because of my job. That's o.k. though because I know I'm going to graduate. I've only been absent once this year since September!"

During his second effort in 9th grade, John had joined the dropout prevention club in his high school and began talking to one of the counsellors. "Even after I screwed up the second time, I went back to my counsellor and he helped me. He's the person I look up to, he's committed to his work. He really cares about you. He comes and looks for you if he doesn't see you in school. He doesn't just wait for you to come to him."

John's resolve is impressive. Even though he has four more years of high school ahead of him, he believes he will get though this time. "My best friend is graduating this year," John says, without envy. "He's going into the Air Force...Two other friends of mine are going to college...If they can do it, so can I...I lift weights now and I enjoy school. It's just fine...You know, it wasn't the school...That's o.k...It's all the other stuff...My father's dying and all..."

"Sure, I used drugs when I was out...But now I think they're a waste of time and money. I'd much rather spend my money on food. I love to eat! And denying the drugs makes me feel good. I just say no and have a couple of beers on the weekend...I'm going to get my diploma and make something of myself."

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TERRI

Terri works as a security guard in a television studio. She works from 4 in the afternoon to 12 midnight, six days a week. "I go to school from 8 to 1 and then I go home, change my clothes and go to work...I don't know how I do it, but I do...I get all my homework done and I haven't missed a day of school this year...I didn't really have much choice...My mother threw me out."

Terri is 18 years old, in the 10th grade. She has been left back several times. Terri's parents were separated when she was four. She has two brothers, 16 and 19, who are the children of her mother and father, and a six year old brother who is the offspring of her mother and the man with whom he mother lives, a man she refers to as her "stepfather." She also has a six year old sister who was adopted by her mother at the age of two. "We didn't see my father much after my parents split up...He's a nice man, my father, but my mother wouldn't let him come around...As we got older, we began to see him on our own."

Terri relates a complicated story of violence and drugs. Six months ago, she and her oldest brother got into an argument which concluded by her brother smashing the back of her skull with a baseball bat. Terri, frightened and angry, called the police. She did not, she points out, inform the police that her mother was smoking crack at the time they arrived, or that her brother supplies her mother with crack, or that the man she calls her stepfather is a drug dealer and a criminal.

Enraged by Terri's effort to protect herself, her mother told her to leave. "She threw all my stuff out," Terri says, stonefaced. "I only took what I was wearing at the time...She took my brother's side because he buys crack for her...and, besides, she doesn't like girl children, she always said that." Terri would not, her mother informed her, be permitted to see her brothers or her sister again. "That was hard because especially the little ones, I like them a lot...I used to buy them clothes...I really miss them."

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That night, after calling her father, Terri went to her friend Delia's house. Delia's mother invited her to stay and Terri moved into an already overcrowded apartment.

"When I was little, I started up with kids but mostly I was all right...My parents both graduated from high school...Not my stepfather, though...He only went to the 7th grade...My mother took in foster children for the money until the social workers began to suspect she did drugs...My father's not like that at all...He doesn't do drugs or anything...My stepfather, he's kind of famous, he's on the news a lot when he's arrested...In and out of jail...My mother was much nicer before she met him....We went to church every Sunday. Now...you don't mention church around there..."

Once when Terri was fifteen, she tried to kill herself by taking a whole bottle of pills. "All that happened was I got real sick to my stomach," she says. "I told my mother I had a stomachache and I went to the hospital. They pumped my stomach out and told my mother what I did and she was really mad. She kept me in the house all the time, nagging me...I used to work even when I lived with her. As long as I gave her half my money, it was o.k. And I bought my brothers clothes, too...and I cooked for them...At least I knew they were eating..."

In junior high school, Terri, feeling desperate, described her home life to a guidance counsellor. The counsellor called a social agency which instituted proceedings and all the children were taken away from Terri's mother. The result of this, according to Terri, was that she spent a week in a shelter. When she got home, she discovered the rest of her siblings had also been returned to her mother. "Nothing changed," Terri remembers. "It only got worse."

In high school, because she was often absent, Terri was sent to the Dropout Prevention Program in her school and she began to talk to a counsellor. Terri likes her counsellor immensely. "I can talk to him...He's great...He's like a brother to me..."

"After my mother threw me out, my grades went way down,"

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Terri says. "My schoolbooks were gone, my radio, everything." When Terri's counsellor learned she had been thrown out by her mother, she was immediately sent to a job placement center. Two days later she went to work. "I like my job," Terri says. "I do all my homework, and I read a lot because I sit at a desk mostly and I have all that time."

"Let me tell you about the Dropout Prevention Program in my school," she volunteers. "You go there and they give you a probation sheet. Every teacher you have has to rate you in classes. Your attendance is required for two months...After that you get a trophy and a certificate and a pass to the movies for a year! And a hat, a tee shirt and a job! I got two certificates...You work two hours a week and they pay you...But you have to come to school..." Terri pauses. "You know, my mother's been on welfare since before I was born," she says. "I want to be a police officer...Dropout Prevention was something! They said I had to go to school and I did and before you knew it, I was in the 10th grade! Just being there made the difference!"

Terri still has some problems she isn't sure how she will handle. Her salary covers her room and board but medical bills are a potential problem. "Someone told me to get a Medicaid card but I don't want to be on the Welfare rolls...Maybe I'll join the union or," she grins, "I just won't get sick."

Since joining the Dropout Prevention Program in her school, Terri's friends have changed a lot. "The people I used to know were types that liked to start up," she says. "Now it's different...Delia and I go to the movies and stuff like that...We don't start up to get into trouble."

Terri misses her little brother and sister. "My little sister is slow...She doesn't get things quickly and stuff like that but she's sweet...I bought the little ones presents," she says, regretfully. "People who see them tell me they look o.k...I guess I'll have to send them the stuff in the mail...You know, even my rabbit's still there..."

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[PART THREE]

SCHOOL PROFILES

The following are profiles of three Dropout Prevention Schools, with a small sampling of the innovative programs taking place in each. The intention of the New York City initiative is to give schools the freedom to develop programs that will work within their particular school's culture. Although working with basic components, each of the 10 laboratory schools adapt and innovate according to their own vision and needs.

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ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

Theodore Roosevelt High School is located right in the center of the Bronx on the famous commercial street known as Fordham Road. The school population is 58% Hispanic, 34% Black, 7% Asian and 2% White, and three-quarters of the students' families are on Public Assistance.

Dropout prevention efforts were aimed at the entire 9th and 10th grades, since research has shown that these first two years of high school are crucial in preventing the patterns of truancy that lead to dropping out.

The following are a few of the many programs undertaken as a result of the participation in the Dropout Prevention Program.

The Roosevelt New School

Like most urban schools, many New York City high schools are overcrowded. Student/teacher ratios are high, intensifying the students' feelings that schools are impersonal institutions, Kafkaesque bureaucracies where students are moved along by the whim of others whom they neither understand nor influence.

Feeling alienated and anonymous, uninvolved and invisible, these students will have a particularly hard time without personal contact with adults who can reassure them that they belong and that people care about their lives, in and out of school. The Roosevelt High School DPP team set out to create smaller learning environments, with a better student/teacher ratio to respond to these needs.

Eight small schools were developed within the larger school to receive incoming 9th graders. Each "New School", as they are called, has between 175 and 200 students with their own coordinator/teacher, guidance counselor and 2 family paraprofessionals.

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For example, there is a bilingual cluster for immigrants; a high-risk reading cluster; a cluster of those reading below level but who have the potential to attend college; a cluster to prepare students for the work place; a cluster for students who lack school success.

Most important, each group of students has several adults at hand who are readily accessible to focus on the concerns of individual children.

The PM School

Given the traditional structure of the school schedule, it is very difficult to "catch up" with or re-take failed subjects before the year is ended. When that time comes it may be too late; at-risk students may have given up or dropped out. Roosevelt decided to extend the school day so at-risk students, especially those with family responsibilities, could take advantage of classes offered in the late afternoon.

The PM school meets the need for a more flexible school day, and operates from 3-5 p.m., three days a week. There are now twenty academic subjects, 10 clubs and other recreational activities offered. Currently, 200 students are enrolled and 320 are registered for clubs.

Partnering with Parents

Students also leave school because they have been temporarily suspended as a result of altercations with other students, teachers or staff. When such trouble erupts, it is important to bring parents into the prevention process. Increased and persistent attention has been paid to keeping parents informed about their children's attendance and suspension problems, so parents can cooperate with school personnel to find workable solutions.

In the first year of the DPP initiative, the parents of Roosevelt's 9th graders received over 11,00 phone calls, 28,000 letters and 1200 home visits which brought them into the prevention process.

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This strategy bore fruit--over 2,000 students returned to school for attendance and counselor interviews; total suspensions for 9th graders decreased by 40%, and total "incidents" were reduced 30%, while serious incidents involving violence were reduced by 41%.

Classroom Enhancements

Artists-in-residence like the Family Life Theatre and Poets in the Schools help students examine their own troubled feelings about school, teachers, family and growing up. By providing young people with dramatic and poetic forms of expression these programs help them understand their own conflicts and better resolve them.

Other Innovations

Outstanding at-risk students are paid for their services as after-school tutors. This opportunity to switch roles and be responsible for enhancing the education of a peer adds a new dimension to the meaning of education and creates an important experience of self-esteem.

Roosevelt H.S. is working to find jobs for all its at risk students, partnering with several community groups to place students in stipended, part-time jobs while they are attending school.

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BUSHWICK HIGH SCHOOL

The original school, built in 1912 and renovated in 1958, now stands in the extremely poor and devastated section of Brooklyn called Bushwick. It serves a student population that is 70% Hispanic, and 28% Black, with a sprinkling of White and Asian teenagers.

The dual centerpiece of the Dropout Prevention Program is (1) on-site case-managment services from Grand Street Settlement House and (2) part-time, stipended work experience for students, funded by DPP, on campus and in the public and private sectors.

CBO's and Case Management

When the Grand Street Settlement came from Manhattan to set up their satellite office in the high school, they brought a variety of much-needed social services for the 150 ninth-graders they had targeted as a population at risk for dropping out.

Social workers, counselors, and job developers work with the school-based planning team, review referrals made to them and deliver the necessary services to students. The case-management approach assures that there is adequate follow-up for each student who is in crisis, or seems headed for trouble.

The BOSS Program

Bushwick Organization of Student Services was the brainchild of the school's Dropout Prevention team and the DPP Coordinator. It disperses DPP funds to pay students for work-experience jobs in the community. At this time there are over 80 students working for various employers including the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the Wykoff Heights Hospital and the Bushwick/Ridgewood Senior Citizens Council. Two teachers from the DPP team do job development and monitor students' work and academic performance.

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Tutoring and Mentoring Programs

At Bushwick, a number of different tutoring and mentoring programs have been devised to provide a short-term, individualized learning experience that encourages many students to stay in school.

One-on-one tutoring of long-term absentees by specially designated teachers was established for students who have been away from school a long time and who find it easier and more productive to "catch up" in a supportive environment, where the painful transition back to "regular" class is understood and respected.

New York University has offered 16 graduate students to tutor and mentor 60 Bushwick students in their academic subjects. Students who need special academic attention receive two weeks of individualized classes created for them with the help of their subject teachers and teachers in the mentoring program. This allows them to work through academic obstacles at their own pace.

School-based planning team

The DPP Coordinator and the planning team have worked smoothly together, initiating and implementing innovative approaches to prevention and boosting morale not only in the faculty and but throughout the school as well.

According to the DPP Coordinator, students' attendance and academic performance have improved significantly since these new services and opportunities are available at school.

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PROSPECT HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL

The school, located near the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens serves students from the surrounding Caribbean community. When the DPP programs were set up no job programs or after school activities existed in the high school.

The Federation of Employment and Guidance Services, a counseling and skills training program offers " Operation Success" and the Victims' Services Agency offers "Project S.M.A.R.T.," an on site mediation training program, to the Dropout Prevention Program. Together, these two community-based organizations provide case-management services for over 400 high-risk students in a population of 2,200 students.

According the DPP Coordinator and the school-based planning team, the programs and activities at Prospect Heights are designed "to retain and retrieve high-risk students and to motivate the average student to continue to achieve and support his/her fellow student.

Collaborations with the Corporations

The Dropout Prevention Program at Prospect Heights has an active collaboration with two major coporations, Shearson/American Express and Pepsi-Cola

Shearson/American Express

Shearson has created internships for one day a week during the school term for 30 high risk students with the promise of permanent jobs for the 20 who show promise. Some students will work full-time during the summer. The students are placed in Telecommunications, Data Entry, Computer Programming and Printing.

According to their teachers and supervisors, the students have demonstrated visible changes in self-esteem and in attitudes towards school work and authority figures. They have taken a more positive approach to their educational goals.

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Other School Enhancements

DPP inspiration and funds have underwritten the creation of a number of student organizations, activities and programs structured to give students a sense of ownership in their school. The International Student Exchange, the Caribbean, Haitian and Film Clubs vie with the drama and choral groups, modeling and personal appearance clubs and, of course, cheerleaders to express school spirit and loyalty.

Students have been trained in mediation techniques by Project S.M.A.R.T, which has dramatically reduced the number of suspensions and dean's referrals. Students learn how to handle disputes and how to resolve conflicts between themselves, their family members and peers. They are taken to observe professional mediators in action in the courts, community mediation centers and throughout the juvenile justice system.

Transitional classes for long-term absentees divide the curriculum into modular credit-bearing units, 6 weeks in length. These classes enable students to be re-integrated into the routine of school.

The Counselor/Student ratio was reduced by DPP funds from 500:1 to 275:1.